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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PNUC](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)

SUBJECT: AMB BRIEFS CONSERVATIVE LAWMAKERS ON ALLIANCE AND  
DPRK STRATEGY

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

#### SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Addressing a study group of Grand National Party lawmakers on March 17, the Ambassador said that growing military, economic and people-to-people ties indicated that, contrary to press reports, the state of the U.S.-ROK alliance was "confident and strong." The Ambassador said that with regard to North Korea, while our tactics may sometimes differ, we shared a common commitment to the Six Party Process and the goal of a peaceful transition toward a unified peninsula. Apparently skeptical of this positive outcome, questions from these opposition party lawmakers focused on contingency planning for the sudden collapse of the DPRK. END SUMMARY.

#### U.S.-ROK RELATIONS

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¶2. (U) On March 17, Ambassador Vershbow met for 90 minutes with the "Institute of National Strategy Studies," a study group comprised of 33 GNP National Assembly members. Rep. Kim Moon-soo, who is presently the leading gubernatorial candidate for Gyeonggi Province, founded this Institute. Other prominent members include GNP Floor Leader Rep. Lee Jae-oh.

¶3. (U) Evaluating the state of the U.S.-ROK relationship as "strong and confident," the Ambassador pointed to the alliance's record of achievements. For example, as a result of the Future of the Alliance talks, the U.S. and the ROK agreed to redeploy 12,500 U.S. troops out of Korea by the end of 2008, relocate U.S. troops out of downtown Seoul and return Yongsan Garrison to the ROKG; consolidate the remaining 25,000 troops into two hubs south of Seoul by the end of 2009; and transfer several military missions to the ROK military.

¶4. (U) Moving to the economic relationship, the Ambassador underscored the strength of the economic and trade relationship and spoke of the compelling benefits to be gained by both sides should agreement on an FTA be achieved. He praised the ROKG for its seriousness of purpose in addressing these issues and said the FTA would represent an historic achievement in our economic relationship. The Ambassador also cited the importance of human ties between the two nations and shared his hope that, just as the FTA agreement would form the basis for the U.S.-ROK economic relationship in the 21st century, the roadmap toward the Visa Waiver Program would lay the basis for expanded

people-to-people ties.

15. (U) North Korea, said the Ambassador, presented the greatest challenge. He emphasized that while the ROK and the U.S. might differ on some details and tactics, there was no gap in basic objectives. He said that both countries agreed that the Six Party Talks were the best way to denuclearize North Korea and open the way to a normal relationship with the DPRK. The governments remained committed to the Six Party Talks and both wanted to see the commitments contained in the September 19 Joint Statement implemented soon. The Ambassador also briefed the lawmakers on the March 7 meeting in New York, stating that the "constructive and business-like" meeting with the North Koreans was a useful opportunity to reiterate our desire for an early resumption of the Six Party Talks without preconditions. The Ambassador said that we would continue to advance policies that demanded that all governments, including Pyongyang, respect the universal rights that belong to every human being.

#### LAWMAKERS PROBE FOR DPRK COLLAPSE SCENARIOS

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16. (C) Questions following the Ambassador's address focused on how the United States would handle the sudden collapse of the DPRK regime. The Ambassador repeatedly stressed that internal reform of the DPRK was needed in order to avoid some of the darker scenarios of a collapse. He said the U.S. and ROK should focus their efforts on persuading the North Korean government to change, introduce market reforms, and ultimately open up politically. He expressed hope that the Six Party Talks would soon resume and that North Korea would show that it was serious about getting rid of nuclear weapons. The parties would then be able to engage more directly with North Korea and encourage policy changes in the

DPRK that would help the North Korean people. The ROK and the U.S. must plan for more difficult scenarios, he acknowledged, but the best approach was to encourage reform so that a peaceful transition could take place.

17. (C) Pressed on what the U.S. role would be in a collapse scenario, the Ambassador said that the U.S. would work as closely as possible with the ROK to bring about stability and the establishment of democratic institutions. South Korea would be in the lead and probably bear more of the burden than the U.S., but the U.S. would be right by the ROK's side. Rep. Lee Jae-oh, Floor Leader (number two) of the GNP, questioned whether the U.S. would assert military control over North Korea like it did over the South following World War II. The Ambassador replied that because the ROK now had a capable military, strong political institutions, and a stable administrative structure, the situation was totally different. Although there might be some good reasons to work jointly with the ROK, such as working together to eliminate any remaining risks from the DPRK military or weapons of mass destruction, the United States would generally view South Korea as being in the lead.

18. (C) Rep. Ahn Myong-ok asked what plans were in place for refugees. The Ambassador said that although the ROK would be the lead actor, the international community would likely provide assistance if there were any major flow of refugees. The international community would likely move quickly to deliver aid to North Korea to prevent people from panicking and feeling the need to flee.

#### MORE CHINA AND RUSSIA ASSISTANCE WOULD BE USEFUL

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19. (C) The Ambassador said that prospects for change in the DPRK would be increased if China were in closer alignment with U.S. and ROK policy. Rep. Kim Sook-joon asked whether U.S. and China positions were in conflict. Although China had been helpful in the Six Party process, the Ambassador replied, its long-term objective might be different than that of the U.S. and the ROK. Rather than unification, China might prefer to have a separate North Korean state as a

buffer between itself and a U.S.-allied ROK.

¶10. (C) Responding to Rep. Kim's follow-up question on whether Russia or other countries could provide more assistance, the Ambassador suggested that Russia could play a more active role in promoting change in the DPRK, including in the Six Party Talks. Russia could be a source for energy assistance and could contribute to regional economic projects. An oil or gas pipeline stretching from Russia through the two Koreas could show the DPRK that it was better to become integrated than remain isolated. Russia could also serve as a positive example for the DPRK as a country that had greatly improved the living standards of its people through a process of structural reform.

#### THE U.S.-ROK MILITARY PARTNERSHIP

¶11. (C) Rep. Shim Jae-chul asked whether the U.S. was satisfied with the ROK's role in the military relationship. The Ambassador said that the U.S. was pleased with state of ROK military modernization and that bilateral agreements to transfer certain key missions, such as counterfire, to the ROK had been achieved. These transfers of major responsibilities did not diminish the U.S. commitment to assist with the defense of the ROK; rather, they spoke well of the health of the alliance.

#### COMMENT

¶12. (C) The questions posed by this particular group of GNP lawmakers illustrate that skepticism about the health of the U.S.-ROK relationship is persistent. Opposition legislators are also concerned about ROKG policy toward the DPRK, questioning the lack of reciprocity in Seoul's economic assistance to North Korea. We expect that these misgivings will only grow louder in the run-up to presidential elections next year. END COMMENT.  
VERSHBOW